

# **OECD Better life index (and other well-being measures)**



## **About the Subjective Well-being Institute**

The Institute of Subjective Well-Being (<http://www.iswb.org/>) is a non-sectarian, non-political institute based in Vancouver (Canada) devoted to sharing both established and pioneering research in the field of subjective well-being. Membership is free and open to researchers, meditators, philosophers and the public at large. ISWB publishes pamphlets and white-papers, freely available on their site, and also edits a newsletter for media experts who want to receive updates about developments in the field of subjective well-being.

ISWB blog <http://www.amareway.org/> publishes daily updates about scientific research and spiritual insights about living a happy and meaningful life. It hosts guest-posts from leading researchers and practitioners in different fields, from neuroscience to First Nations' wisdom, from Dharma to Yoga, positive psychology, etc.



# Chapter 1 – AmAre Way

*Happiness and Meaning = Aware and Accepting + Meaningful and  
Motivated + Active and Attentive + Resilient and Respectful + Eating  
(Properly) and Exercising*

In Italian, AmAre means "to love"; in English, interconnectedness: (I)Am (we) Are. AmAre stands for being:

- \* **A** – **A**ware and **A**ccepting
- \* **M** – **M**eaningful and **M**otivated
- \* **A** – **A**ctive and **A**ttentive
- \* **R** – **R**esilient and **R**espectful
- \* **E** – **E**ating properly and **E**xercising

Being **Aware**: aware of context, aware of feelings, intentions. Aware of how we see things, our strengths, values and biases. Aware that, happiness and meaning are not only an end result which shines from far in the future; it is also within us, here and now, and it is about the way we live. Happiness is the way. Through our awareness and actions, we gain the courage to change the things we can change, the serenity to accept the things we can't change. And the wisdom to know the difference.

Being **Accepting**: of things we cannot change, which are inevitable. Of how other people are, and especially how we perceive them.

Being **Meaningful**, by doing what matters, when it matters.

Being **Motivated** means we cultivate our motivation on a daily basis. Some motivations may be common to all, like to live peacefully and be kind to others. Some are more peculiar. When we pursue a specific goal in our daily life, being motivated means to know what we want to do, by leveraging our strengths and grow the energies necessary to move into Being Active.

Being **Active** is important, because actions bring tangible results. We also need to be **Attentive**, so we can be receptive of the feedback and reactions to what we do in any given context, and adapt. Being active and being attentive are a self-reinforcing loop which brings happiness and other positive results to us and to the people, beings and environment we listen to.

We also need to be **Resilient**. Life is not always a big smiling adventure, sometimes external situations can be tough, so it is important for us to bounce back on our feet. Sometimes, there are factors which do not facilitate our peaceful living, so we need to be persistent.

Being **Respectful** is important, because resilience is about persistence and not growing a hard-skin. Respectful of us, other people (who are, too, trying to be happy, and likely also trying to live peacefully, sometimes in ways which look different from ours), beings and environment.

**Eating properly**, in terms of quality, quantity and company, is important. For us, and for the impact it has on the environment.

**Exercising** is also important, both for our body and mind.

Now, we see how to assess our current situation, applying the AmAre framework. The first A stands for Awareness, so here we are with meta-awareness, with awareness about our own awareness. Then, after several chapters devoted to tools and approaches you can use to maximize each component of the AmAre framework, after you make a road-map suitable for your context, and implement them, you will be presented the same assessment, so you can monitor changes over time.

### **Awareness of our here and now: how to assess it?**

Disclaimer: the tools described in this chapter are a way to facilitate happiness and meaning. **They are not a crystal ball, nor deterministic.** We benefit from the learning process of considering different variables, assessing course of actions and seeing potential results in scenarios. The approach drafted here also allows to measure results, building a useful; repository of aggregated, anonymous subjective well-being data.

AmAre is not a panacea or a quick fixer. It is a framework to initiate reflection and skillful action. It is also an outreach method: there are many points to consider and, literally, every day there are several new research findings published in the field of well-being. AmAre is a way to make our body of knowledge easier to communicate and accessible, so then each of us can see her/his path and walk in appropriate ways. Where appropriate is subjective, it changes from person to person, within the similarities that we have as human being.

A		M		A		R		E	
Aware Accepting		Meaningful Motivated		Active Attentive		Resilient Respectful		Eating Exercising	
G	W	G	W	G	W	G	W	G	W

To assess your current situation, in terms of what facilitates happiness, meaning and fulfilment, please assign in the chart above a weight and a grade to each variable. If there are additional aspects you want to assess, just add as many columns as necessary. As a rule of thumb: too few variables lead to a superficial assessment, too many variables lead to a confused assessment, so try to stay within the ten variables provided plus a few of your own if necessary.

For each variable, please specify:

**w: weight**, importance given to each aspect (sum of all weights should be 100)

**g: grade**, rating given to each aspect (each grade is a value between 0 and 1)

and then use this formula to calculate your AmAre Index:

$$\begin{aligned}
 & (AwareW * AwareG) + (AcceptingW * AcceptingG) + \\
 & (MeaningfulW * MeaningfulG) + (MotivatedW * MotivatedG) + \\
 & (ActiveW * ActiveG) + (AttentiveW * AttentiveG) + (ResilientW \\
 & * ResilientG) + (RespectfulW * RespectfulG) + (EatingW * \\
 & EatingG) + (ExercisingW * ExercisingG)
 \end{aligned}$$

If you want to use a spreadsheet, where you can insert the values and see them automatically calculated, you can use:

<http://spsh.amareway.org/>

### What does it mean?

AmAre formula (Happiness is being: Aware and Accepting + Meaningful and Motivated + Active and Attentive + Resilient and Respectful + Eating Properly and Exercising) is meant to be descriptive and preventive, but not predictive. That is, it

quantifies the current situation, and the strengths and weaknesses we should be aware of and act upon. Regardless of what the number says, we are always responsible, here and now, for our happiness, so a high result means we should keep building our happiness as we have successfully done so far, and a lower result means there are aspects to act upon to improve our lives.

One of the formula's strengths is its unlikeness to reach One, the perfect score, or Zero. This formula is useful so we can improve our awareness about the situation so far, and build a better present. Once the formula served its purposes, we can move on. Because the ultimate happiness is not reaching number 1, it is in finding and renewing the appropriate life-dynamics. If we can accept the way life is, and the fact that different people assign different weights and grades to the pillars of their happiness, and still respect and care about all of us, doing our best for the mutual happiness, we are on the way to build together a lasting happy living.

This is a scale to interpret the overall result of the formula:

**0-0.3:** This is an unlikely result, so please double check each value inserted. If values are correct, it is possible the perception of your Subjective Well-Being (SWB) tends toward emphasizing the non-positive aspects, or that there is a short-term serious issue. This means there is a need to work on all your priorities to make them more satisfying to you in the medium term.

**0.31-0.60:** Your level of SWB could be higher, if you are closer to 0.31 result. If you are closer to 0.5, you are near an exact average value where you perceive the same value of positive and non-positive components in your life. In both cases, by working on the AmAre variables (starting from the ones with higher weight and lower grade), you can substantially improve your well-being.

**0.61-0.90:** You tend towards an optimal level of SWB. You feel happy, and likely experienced most or at least many of the happiness "fringe benefits". You likely live joyfully everyday: no matter the ups and downs we all have, you can make the best of them for yourself and the people around you.

**0.91-1:** This result is unlikely to be reached, so please double check each value inserted. If values are correct, you are



achieving the maximum level of SWB, which you can sustain by living joyfully.

To interpret the value of each AmAre variable, you can use the same scale. If a variable is high in weight, and low in grade, then it requires attention and action to improve it. If a variable is low in weight, and high in grade, then you may ask yourself if its grade is slightly over estimated.

We suggest calculating your AmAre Index once per week for the first 5 weeks. Then, to calculate it once per month. Please make sure to start from scratch at each calculation, meaning you should not check values assigned in the past; after calculating your current AmAre Index, you can then check what changed compared to the previous calculations. If you want to be reminded about monthly calculation, you can register the AmAre newsletter on <http://www.amareway.org/>

### **How does AmAre facilitate happiness?**

Using an AmAre approach facilitates happiness, mainly by bringing attention to aspects which are important for skillful interaction with people and the context, and by making easier to develop the necessary skills.

**A – Aware and Accepting:** how can we be more aware of people's emotions and thoughts? How to accept that we have many similarities, and also differences?

**M – Meaningful and Motivated:** how can we better understand, and remind to us regularly, the importance of being empathic?

**A – Active and Attentive:** how more appropriate and effective are our actions, once we are empathic? How can we keep attentive to people's feedback, to ensure we connect with their emotions properly, without misinterpreting them?

**R – Resilient and Respectful:** becoming more empathic may take time, and it is an ongoing commitment; how can we cultivate resiliency, so we are able to be empathic even when it is not easy? What are suitable ways to show we respect people's feelings?

**E – Eating properly and Exercising:** how does the food we eat influence the way we relate to others? Which foods nourishes us, and which are taxing on our health? Which

exercising and eating habits make easier to relate to other people, and which ones are making us isolated?

Most of facilitation, including facilitating empathy, is done by example. By applying AmAre to cultivate your empathy, and your happiness, you can then adapt it to the context in which children are. The following chapters are about applying AmAre to daily life, the more familiar you are with it, the easier it will be to leverage AmAre into the daily facilitation of empathy among children.

### **1.3 Where are references and further information?**

<http://www.amareway.org/>

(Redirect to official website)

# Chapter 2 – OECD Better life index

Well-being = weighted (Housing + Income + Jobs + Community + Education + Environment + Governance + Health + Life + Satisfaction + Safety + Work-life balance)

## 2.1 How to calculate it?

The "OECD Better life index" may sound familiar if you have been using AmAre Index, because they are both built with graded/weighted approaches which allow the index to be compared across people, countries, categories, etc., at the same time respecting the subjective assessment of each respondent.

The eleven "topics" of well-being identified by the OECD are: Housing, Income, Jobs, Community, Education, Environment, Governance, Health, Life, Satisfaction, Safety, Work-life balance. OECD is accepting advices from users about new topics to add to the Index. Respondents can entry their grades and topics weights on <http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/>

Each topic is built on one to three specific indicators. In the case of the Work-Life Balance, for example, three separate measures are considered: the number of employees working long hours; the percentage of working mothers; and the time people devote to leisure and personal activities. In the future, new indicators (describing sustainability of well-being over time) will be added.

The Index covers the 34 countries which are members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. OECD Better life index does not assign rankings to countries. Users can investigate how each of the 11 topics can contribute to well-being.

## 2.2 Where are references and further information?

<http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/>

(OECD Better life index official website)



# Chapter 3 – Positive Psychology Questionnaires

$$Happiness = Pleasure + flow + meaning$$

## 3.1 How to calculate it?

Martin Seligman, leading positive psychologists, offer a wealth of questionnaires in their books and websites, more information are provided in 3.3. Considering such questionnaires are self-calculated using their online version, here we just provide extremely simplified versions:

$$Happiness (Seligman) = Pleasure + flow + meaning$$

$$Simplified\ version = [(Hours\ spent\ doing\ pleasant\ activities) + (Hours\ spent\ in\ total\ immersion) + (Hours\ spent\ doing\ meaningful\ activities)] / Number\ of\ days\ considered$$

Pleasant activities	Total immersion	Meaningful activities	Total hours	Number of days	Happy hours per day

For simplicity, you can calculate this by adding the average amount of hours you spend in one day doing what brings you pleasure, what starts a flow and what really gives a meaning to your life.

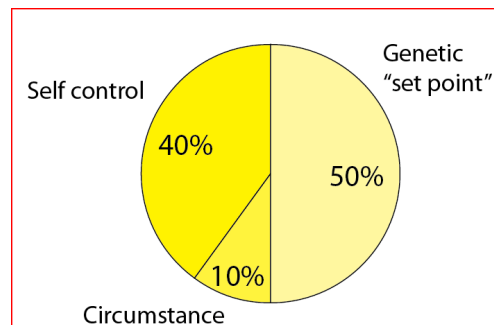
For example: 30 minutes spent eating + 120 minutes spent speaking on the phone with clients + 60 minutes spent volunteering

Or you can have a more detailed view, for example by keeping a diary for one month where you write the way you allocate your time daily, and then divide it by the number of days in that month.

### 3.2 What does it mean?

Martin Seligman, thanks to four decades of research in the field, found there are three main pillars for happiness. Pleasure is the most commonly experienced, and also the least lasting; for example, the pleasure derived from eating an ice-cream, with declining marginal benefit derived from each bite. Flow is about total absorption in a specific task, which can be as short as writing an important email or as long as working on a book. Meaning is the life with a purpose which, for its own definition, is not happening often and is the longer lasting.

Another positive psychologist, Sonja Lyubomirsky, offers an equation where  $\text{Happiness} = \text{Genetic Set Point} + \text{Life Circumstances} + \text{Intentional Activities}$ , which can be expressed visually as:



Source: Wikipedia

### 3.3 Where are references and further information?

About Martin Seligman's research:

<http://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/Default.aspx>

<http://www.stanford.edu/class/msande271/onlinetools/LearnedOpt.html>

About Sonja Lyubomirsky's research:

<http://www.faculty.ucr.edu/~sonja/>

# Chapter 4 – Facebook Gross National Happiness

$$\text{Happiness} = (\text{positive words}) - (\text{non-positive words})$$

## 4.1 How to calculate it?

Facebook itself calculates the index, by automatically and anonymously analyzing the number of positive and negative words in status updates for selected Countries. Of course, this means that, even when facebookers are just passing along a story, the words contained in a breaking-news can influence the index. For example, the Australia's index was lowest on Feb. 13, 2008, the day Prime Minister Kevin Rudd apologized in Parliament to indigenous Australians, reflecting the 4 percent of Aussie status updates containing the word "sorry."

Data is aggregated in graphs, containing several metrics. GNH, represents Facebook measure of Gross National Happiness. Positivity and Negativity represent the two components of GNH: the extent to which words used on that day were positive and negative. Gross National Happiness is the difference between the positivity and negativity scores, though they are interesting to view on their own. The same model is applied separately to each country analyzed. Each model is thus calibrated differently, which eliminates effects due to differences in the countries' population and language use. .

## 4.2 What does it mean?

These are some findings, as published on March 2010 by Facebook Data Team:

- Christmas, New Year's Eve and Valentine's Day are still among the happiest days for all of these nations, and Friday, Saturday and Sunday are happiest days of the week.
- Canadians are happier the day before Canadian Thanksgiving

(a Sunday) than on the actual Canadian Thanksgiving Day (a Monday).

- Happiness levels in the UK seem to have the least variation, with the fewest large peaks among all the graphs due to holidays.

#### **4.3 Where are references and further information?**

##### **Facebook GNH**

[http://apps.facebook.com/gnh\\_index/](http://apps.facebook.com/gnh_index/)

**Google Insight:** a tool similar to Facebook GNH, to show where (please keep in consideration people mainly use native language to search online) and what people are searching for when it comes to Happiness  
<http://www.google.com/insights/search/#cat=19&q=happiness&date=1%2F2010%2012m&cmpt=q>



# Chapter 5 – Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index

$$\text{Happiness} = \text{Life Evaluation} + \text{Emotional Health} + \text{Physical Health} + \text{Healthy Behaviour} + \text{Work Environment} + \text{Basic Access}$$

## 5.1 How to calculate it?

The Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index measures health and well-being in USA. For at least 25 years, the Well-Being Index will collect and measure the daily pulse of US well-being. Survey respondents are asked an in-depth series of questions associated with health and well-being about:

- Life Evaluation
- Emotional Health
- Physical Health
- Healthy Behaviour
- Work Environment
- Basic Access

As reported on their site <http://www.well-beingindex.com> “The Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index segments the data for respondents in both adverse and optimum situations according to household income, location demographics (based on zip code), and personal health status. The results are reported in continuous daily, weekly, and monthly averages. The survey methods for Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index relies on live (not automated) interviewers, dual-frame random-digit-dial (RDD) sampling (which includes landlines as well as wireless phone sampling to reach those in wireless-only households), and a random selection method for choosing respondents within a household. Additionally, daily tracking includes Spanish-language interviews for respondents who speak only Spanish, includes interviews in Alaska and Hawaii, and relies on a multi-call design to reach respondents not contacted on the initial attempt. The data are weighted daily to compensate for

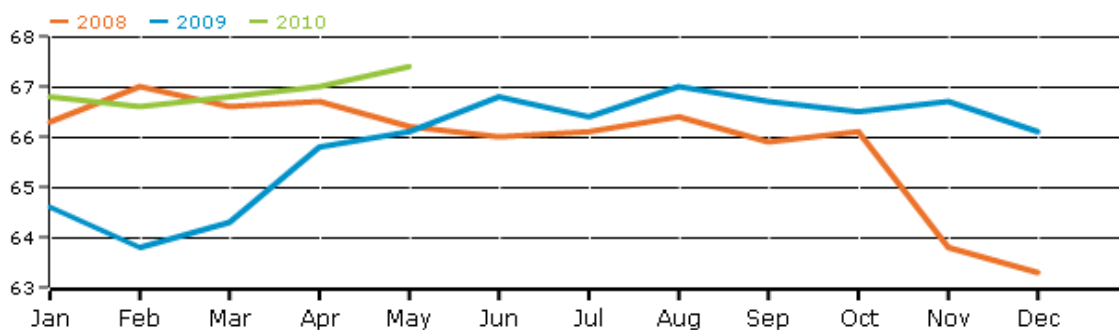
disproportions in selection probabilities and nonresponse. The data are weighted to match targets from the U.S. Census Bureau".

For corporate use, the same organization designed the Healthways Well-Being Assessment. It is administered by Healthways to employers, health plans and other organizations, leveraging Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index questions for a baseline comparison against the nation and geographical areas. It emphasizes employee health, employee productivity, work environment (including job stress, satisfaction with benefits, employee engagement), a culture of health assessing the organization's support of healthy lifestyle choices. The Healthways Well-Being Assessment also contains additional depth of measurement on health risks and employee productivity.

## 5.2 What does it mean?

By helping Americans understand how work impacts life and health and conversely how life affects work and health, Gallup-Healthways aims to work together to improve well-being for a better way of life.

This is an overview of the index from 2008 to 2010:



## 5.3 Where are references and further information?

<http://www.well-beingindex.com/>

<http://www.well-beingindex.com/newsroom.asp>

# Chapter 6 – Gross National Happiness (Buthan)

$$\text{Happiness} = \text{Economic} + \text{Environmental} + \text{Physical} + \text{Mental} \\ + \text{Workplace} + \text{Social} + \text{Political Wellness}$$

## 6.1 How to calculate it?

There is no exact quantitative definition of GNH, but elements that contribute to it are subject to quantitative measurement. Med Jones, President of International Institute of Management, introduced an enhanced GNH concept, treating happiness as a socioeconomic development metric. It tracks socioeconomic development in 7 areas

- Economic Wellness: measured by direct survey and statistical measurement of economic metrics (consumer debt, average income to consumer price index ratio, income distribution, etc.)
- Environmental Wellness: measured by direct survey and statistical measurement of environmental metrics (pollution, noise, traffic, etc.)
- Physical Wellness: measurement of physical health metrics (severe illnesses, etc.)
- Mental Wellness: measured by direct survey and statistical measurement of mental health metrics (usage of antidepressants, rise/decline of psychotherapy patients, etc.)
- Workplace Wellness: measured by direct survey and statistical measurement of labour metrics (jobless claims, job change, workplace complaints and lawsuits, etc.)
- Social Wellness: measured by direct survey and statistical measurement of social metrics (discrimination, safety, divorce rates, complaints of domestic conflicts and family lawsuits, public lawsuits, crime rates, etc.)

- Political Wellness: measured by direct survey and statistical measurement of political metrics (quality of local democracy, individual freedom, and foreign conflicts, etc.)

## **6.2 What does it mean?**

Gross national happiness (GNH) was coined in 1972 by then Bhutan's King Jigme Singye Wangchuck. GNH is based on the premise that some forms of development are not measurable in monetary terms (a concept that is advanced by the nascent field of ecological economics) while conventional development models stress economic growth as the ultimate objective.

## **6.3 Where are references and further information?**

<http://www.grossnationalhappiness.com/>

# Chapter 7 – SWB - Science of happiness

*If I am not for myself, who will be for me? If I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?*

## 7.0 Disclaimer

Scientific research about happiness provides a wealth of information, and facilitates substantially to live a happy life. It makes accessible to all the aggregated experiences of many other human beings, who are daily living their lives in the best way they can. It also provides several valuable inputs to policy makers, not just individuals.

Some important points to consider, in order to make the best out of the positive effects that scientific research has on living joyfully:

- **self-fulfilling prophecies:** with “exact” sciences like physics, describing a phenomenon doesn't change it, even if of course it influences the way we look at it. Regardless of what we measure as the value of the gravity law, the speed at which stones fall is not affected. Research about happiness, and what makes people happy, is bounded to influence happiness-reinforcing actions.

- **diminishing returns and intentions:** what facilitate our happiness today may have lower positive impact in the future, because we get used it; this is especially true with pleasant activities; lasting happiness is about our outlook about the present, not only about what we do. Also, intentions count a lot: sharing time and resources with other people makes us more happy than buying something for ourselves; this is what both our experience and scientific research tells us. Still, just based on this, we would give everything away and expect to become happy for ever, we would be in for disappointment. Sharing

facilitates happiness when we feel the importance of sharing, and not when we pursue sharing like a task to egoistically enhance our well-being.

### **7.1 Defining happiness and subjective well-being**

Eudaimonia is a classical Greek word, commonly translated as happiness. Consisting of the word "eu" ("good" or "well being") and "daimōn" ("spirit", used by extension one's fortune), it often refers to human flourishing. It was a central concept in ancient Greek ethics, along with the term "arete" ("virtue") and phronesis (practical or moral wisdom). Webster dictionary defines happiness as “A) state of well-being and contentment, joy. B) a pleasurable or satisfying experience”.

These definitions show that the different aspects of happiness are given different importance by different people; the meaning of happiness in the ears of the listener. For some, it is an inflated term plastered on self-help books; for others, a way of living achieved by living in harmony with ourselves, events, conditions, people and environment around us.

Subjective well-being is not the same as happiness, even if such terms are often used as synonymous. Subjective well-being, as defined by Ed Diener, covers "a broad category of phenomena that includes people's emotional responses, domain satisfactions, and global judgements of life satisfaction. Subjective well-being consists of two distinctive components: an affective part (evaluation guided by emotions and feeling), which refers to both the presence of positive affect (PA) and the absence of negative affect (NA), and a cognitive part (information-based appraisal of one's life, evaluated using expectations and “ideal life” as benchmark). It is commonly abbreviated as SWB.

### **7.2 Measuring subjective well-being**

We have already covered some approaches to measure SWB in the previous seven chapters. There are several ways SWB has been measured, both on a collective and individual basis. Often, countries are ranked by their happiness, and cities

by how liveable they are.

This ranks how well nations combine level and differences in happiness, for the period 2000-2009, as reported by Veenhoven, R., World Database of Happiness, Erasmus University Rotterdam (available at: <http://worlddatabaseofhappiness.eur.nl> accessed on July 7th, 2010):

Costa Rica	79
Denmark	78
Switzerland	74
Finland	73
Netherlands	72

This ranks the most liveable cities in the World, as reported by Economist Intelligent Survey (available at: [http://www.economist.com/blogs/gulliver/2009/06/liveable\\_vancouver](http://www.economist.com/blogs/gulliver/2009/06/liveable_vancouver) accessed on July 7th, 2010):

<b>Liveability</b>		
2009 (100=ideal)		
Rank		Liveability
1	Vancouver	98.0
2	Vienna	97.9
3	Melbourne	97.5
4	Toronto	97.2
5	Perth	96.6
	Calgary	96.6
7	Helsinki	96.2
8	Geneva	96.1
9	Sydney	96.1
	Zurich	96.1
*Weighted index rating whereby 100%=exceptional quality of life and 0%=intolerable		
Source: Economist Intelligence Unit		

### **7.3 Maximizing subjective well-being**

Since social-sciences This is a selection of scientific findings about SWB; as every selection, more could have been add, and we can discover more about it by reading in full the books of the authors mentioned here, and their colleagues.

Mindfulness: as reported by psychologist Sonja Lyubomirsky, study participants who appreciate positive moments of their day, “showed significant increases in happiness and reductions in depression”.

Money aren't everthing: researchers Tim Kasser and Richard Ryan found that “The more we seek satisfactions in material goods, the less we find them there. The satisfaction has a short half-life—it’s very fleeting.”. Money-seekers also score lower on tests of vitality and self-actualization. These findings are consistent across nations and cultures.

Have Meaningful Goals: “People who strive for something significant, whether it’s learning a new craft or raising moral children, are far happier than those who don’t have strong dreams or aspirations. As humans, we actually require a sense of meaning to thrive.” say Ed Diener and Robert Biswas-Diener. “Happiness lies at the intersection between pleasure and meaning. Whether at work or at home, the goal is to engage in activities that are both personally significant and enjoyable” according to Tal Ben-Shahar.

Exercising matters: exercising delivers a sense of accomplishment, plus opportunity for interaction with people and environment, releasing endorphins and boosting self-esteem. And, under the supervision of a doctor, it may be very effective in healing depression.

Positive outlook: “Happy people...see possibilities, opportunities, and success. When they think of the future, they are optimistic, and when they review the past, they tend to savor the high points,” say Diener and Biswas-Diener.



#### **7.4 Sustaining subjective well-being**

If we pursue a meaningful life, or flow, happiness tend to be sustainable, and even self-reinforcing. But if we are on the hedonic treadmill, running here and there but in reality always being at point zero in terms of living joyfully, then in reality we are just aiming at pleasure (with its hedonic adaptation which results in declining value in how we perceive the same activities other time). And, in this case, variety doesn't really help us; as Daniel Gilbert (Harvard Professor of Psychology and author of "Stumbling on Happiness") says: "Research shows that people do tend to seek more variety than they should. We all think we should try a different doughnut every time we go to the shop, but the fact is that people are measurably happier when they have their favourite on every visit - provided the visits are sufficiently separated in time". As Daniel Gilbert (Harvard Professor of Psychology and author of "Stumbling on Happiness") says: "The main error, of course, is that we vastly overestimate the hedonic consequences of any event. Neither positive nor negative events hit us as hard or for as long as we anticipate. This "impact bias" has proved quite robust in both field and laboratory settings". He also adds: "We are often quite poor at predicting what will make us happy in the future for two reasons. First, we have been given a lot of disinformation about happiness by two sources: Genes and culture. Both genes and cultures are self-perpetuating entities that need us to do things for them so that they can survive. Because we are interested in our own happiness and not theirs, both entities fool us into believing that's what is good for them is also good for us". Does this mean we should relay only on scientists to know more about our happiness? Surely not, but we also to be aware of the effects gene and meme have on our assumptions about happiness; assumptions and beliefs are formulated when we do not know, let's live joyfully so we can then evaluate by ourselves what are appropriate ways to act in each situation.

#### **7.5 Subjective well-being and generosity**

Elizabeth W. Dunn is assistant professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of British Columbia, and is well-known for her research in the field of happiness, self knowledge, affective forecasting, implicit social

cognition. In the conclusions of her paper titled "Spending Money on Others Promotes Happiness", she wrote "While much research has examined the effect of income on happiness, we suggest that how people spend their money may be at least as important as how much money they earn. Specifically, we hypothesized that spending money on other people may have a more positive impact on happiness than spending money on oneself. Providing converging evidence for this hypothesis, we found that spending more of one's income on others predicted greater happiness both cross-sectionally (in a nationally representative survey study) and longitudinally (in a field study of windfall spending). Finally, participants who were randomly assigned to spend money on others experienced greater happiness than those assigned to spend money on themselves.

### **7.5 Subjective well-being and social networks**

Human relationships are consistently found to be the most important correlation with human happiness. Happier people tend to have good relations with family and friends, as said by Diener and Biswas-Diener, who also add that "We don't just need relationships, we need close ones" that involve understanding and caring. Studies, including the one published on the British Medical Journal, reported that happiness in social networks may spread from person to person. Quoting its conclusions: "While there are many determinants of happiness, whether an individual is happy also depends on whether others in the individual's social network are happy. Happy people tend to be located in the centre of their local social networks and in large clusters of other happy people. The happiness of an individual is associated with the happiness of people up to three degrees removed in the social network. Happiness, in other words, is not merely a function of individual experience or individual choice but is also a property of groups of people. Indeed, changes in individual happiness can ripple through social networks and generate large scale structure in the network, giving rise to clusters of happy and unhappy individuals. These results are even more remarkable considering that happiness requires close physical proximity to spread and that the effect decays over time.

Our results are consistent with previous work on the evolutionary basis of human emotions and with work focusing on the fleeting direct spread of emotions. In addition to their internal and psychological relevance, emotions have a specifically social role: when humans experience emotions, they tend to show them. Like laughter and smiling, the emotion of happiness might serve the evolutionarily adaptive purpose of enhancing social bonds. Human laughter, for example, is believed to have evolved from the “play face” expression seen in other primates in relaxed social situations. Such facial expressions and positive emotions enhance social relations by producing analogous pleasurable feelings in others, by rewarding the efforts of others, and by encouraging ongoing social contact. Given the organization of people (and early hominids) into social groups larger than pairs, such spread in emotions probably served evolutionarily adaptive purposes. There are thus good biological, psychological, and social reasons to suppose that social networks (both in terms of their large scale structure and in terms of the interpersonal ties of which they are composed) would be relevant to human happiness.

Our data do not allow us to identify the actual causal mechanisms of the spread of happiness, but various mechanisms are possible. Happy people might share their good fortune (for example, by being pragmatically helpful or financially generous to others), or change their behaviour towards others (for example, by being nicer or less hostile), or merely exude an emotion that is genuinely contagious (albeit over a longer time frame than previous psychological work has indicated). Psychoneuroimmunological mechanisms are also conceivable, whereby being surrounded by happy individuals has beneficial biological effects.

The spread of happiness seems to reach up to three degrees of separation, just like the spread of obesity and smoking behaviour. Hence, although the person to person effects of these outcomes tend to be quite strong, they decay well before reaching the whole network. In other words, the reach of a particular behaviour or mood cascade is not limitless. We

conjecture that this phenomenon is generic. We might yet find that a “three degrees of influence rule” applies to depression, anxiety, loneliness, drinking, eating, exercise, and many other health related activities and emotional states, and that this rule restricts the effective spread of health phenomena to three degrees of separation away from the ego.

Our findings have relevance for public health. To the extent that clinical or policy manoeuvres increase the happiness of one person, they might have cascade effects on others, thereby enhancing the efficacy and cost effectiveness of the intervention. For example, illness is a potential source of unhappiness for patients and also for those individuals surrounding the patient. Providing better care for those who are sick might not only improve their happiness but also the happiness of numerous others, thereby further vindicating the benefits of medical care or health promotion. There is of course a tradition of community approaches to mental health, but this longstanding concern is now being coupled with a burgeoning interest in health and social networks. More generally, conceptions of health and concerns for the well-being of both individuals and populations are increasingly broadening to include diverse “quality of life” attributes, including happiness. Most important from our perspective is the recognition that people are embedded in social networks and that the health and well-being of one person affects the health and well-being of others. This fundamental fact of existence provides a conceptual justification for the speciality of public health. Human happiness is not merely the province of isolated individuals”.

# Overture to future releases

*One's end is another's start*

## **Starting a paradigm shift: degrees of appropriateness**

In an analogical world, it was efficient to think digitally. That is, in a world without our current technological know-how, people preferred to reduce accuracy in favour of thinking in terms of right and wrong, discrete values, 0 or 1. In a digital world, it is effective to think analogically. That is, in a world where specialization is wide-spread and processing power easily available, people can improve accuracy and think in terms of degrees of appropriateness, with continuous values. Many debates are floating in the air, including the ones about SWB, where different schools of thought aim to prove they are totally right, and everyone else totally wrong. The paradigm shift is to think inclusively: given one opportunity to analyze, its values may tend towards one direction in a specific context, and towards another direction in another context. By pooling together our experiences and expertise, we can discuss which course of actions are more appropriate, or which outcomes more likely to occur, instead of thinking in terms of right or wrong, 0 or 1.

## **Free-will is a fact, if we are mindful**

We are free to act and we can take charge of our lives, as long as we are mindful. If we just act based on reflex and instinct, then we are bounded to “fight or flight” behaviour.

## **SWB has implications for public policy**

Politicians can no longer focus only on monetary indicators when designing and implementing their policies. Subjective well-being is important for voters, often when they are not even fully aware of it. For example, environmental conditions influence voters' moods: what is the point of a few points increase in GDP, or local business turn-over, if the cost for that is measured in parks being wiped away, with much lower air quality etc? This is not to say monetary indicators are

not important, this just means they are not enough and need to be integrated with SWB indicators, like the ones provided by Gallup. Also, with proper research which estimates the savings of SWB policies on the health-bill (for example, “it is estimated that \$ XYZ are saved every month thanks to policies which facilitate healthy living”), and improvement in results, of Countries, it becomes easier for policy-makers to take fact-based decisions.

### **SWB has implications for international relations**

Subjective well-being plays leading role in 21st century public diplomacy: would you be grateful to a foreign Country, whose traditions and current infrastructure allows you to improve your health? China and India, with their TCM and Ayurveda, are especially well placed to contribute to the SWB of people around the World, both in terms of incoming tourists who are visiting clinics etc. and foreign citizens who can benefit in their home Country from the expertise of Chinese and Indian expatriates, and their students.

### **SWB agents, objects, actions can be classified as hot, mild, cool**

There are “agents”, “objects” and “actions” facilitating SWB: agents are the providers/producers/facilitators of a given SWB object; an object is the physical substance, or the approach/procedure, of a SWB action; an action is what is required by a person to embrace a SWB object. To make some examples: a meditation instructor, or a pharmaceutical company, are agents; a given approach to meditation, or a pill, are objects; the act of meditating, or taking/being given a pill, are actions. Agents are often subject to public policy; objects, to industry/regulatory agencies standards; actions, to the common sense of the person performing/receiving them.

“Agents”, “objects” and “actions” can be classified based on the different degrees of participation they require from the person who embraces (or is prescribed) them. “Hot” indicates an object which require little participation from the person choosing it; it is usually a silver-bullet solution to address one specific issue, often appropriate in life-threatening situation.

Medicines are often “hot” objects. “Cool” indicates an object which require considerably greater participation from the person choosing it; it is usually a holistic solution to address a wide range of aspects, often appropriate when immediate results are not the main goals. Improving one’s eating habits is an example of “cool” object. “Mild” indicates an object, or a bundle of objects, which require average participation from the person choosing it; it usually brings a mix of immediate and long term results.

### **Being happy together: multilevel happiness**

People can be wealthy while other people are starving, unfortunately that occurs quite often. But we cannot be happy in a vacuum, joyful beings who are an island to themselves; as mentioned, happiness is social and contagious. We also find the idea of Multilevel happiness appropriate. When it comes to multilevel marketing, often early the first movers (the ones at the top of the scheme) are the one profiting, while others are just feeding them; multilevel happiness creates joy for all, and sometimes the last to join even benefit from aggregated experiences and happiness of the friends who preceded them. Let's be agents of happiness!

### **Being happy together: without dependency**

Sometimes, we may think that, by carrying other people on our shoulders, we are going to make their lives better. In reality, we are just contributing to making them dependent on us. There are exception, but in most of the cases, people can usually take them of themselves, and are happier when they do. We should be generous with all, without making them dependent on us. We should help in case of emergency and for long term projects, but making other people dependant on us for their daily living presents dangers: to them, because they no longer feel empowered: to us, because it grows our ego, by making us feeling so important for others.

### **Lasting happiness**

Provisional happiness can be influenced by external

short-term events; lasting happiness, is influenced both by objective (genetics and natural predispositions) and subjective (educating our emotions; ensure that, if they crystallize into moods, they are positive ones) personal factors . By knowing better how to develop our subjective factors, and how to maximize our objective factors, we increase our happiness.

### **Happiness is a way of living**

Happiness is the result of what we think and do. Happiness is not a target to aim to, nor a place to reach and blissfully sit there forever. If we are concerned only with happiness, we are going to miss it; if we live our lives in ways appropriate the context, we are happy.

Happiness is like a garden: it comes in different shapes, sizes, colours; it grows on different soils, under different weather conditions; it brings different flowers. What's common about our garden of happiness is that it needs to be understood and nurtured, cultivated and loved. And there is no such thing as cultivating our small fenced garden in a vacuum: it depends on how other gardens are, which seeds are carried around by bees, etc.

### **Power of context**

We also need to understand strengths and weaknesses are never absolute, and always contextual: a shy person makes an ideal listener, and maybe not the most performing social butterfly. For this reason, shy people may put themselves in the contexts where they can facilitate happiness for them and other people; and also let themselves go in more social situation. Still, happiness is more building in strengths, and not force ourselves in filling what we see as voids.

### **We can change: Neuroplasticity and Neurogenesis**

Science discovered that our brain can be rewired (neuroplasticity). And not only that, new neurons can be generated (neurogenesis). At any age, and in almost every condition. Of course, there are some stages of our lives, and



certain conditions, where neuroplasticity and neurogenesis are facilitated more; still, how we think and what we do rewires our brain, and the way our brains are wired influence how we see the world and what we do. We can make this a virtual circle, supporting our growth as individuals and member of society.

### **Being aware of awareness: consciousness matters**

Scientific research made giants steps toward a deeper understanding of consciousness. While we do not all need to be experts in neuroscience, an understanding of its discoveries can facilitate our happiness, making us more aware of how our awareness works .

### **Evolution explains a lot about our instincts**

Why, as individuals, our behaviour may be so unpredictable, but as “crowds” patterns are easy to spot? Because, among other reasons, there was an evolutionary advantage in following the wisdom of the crowd, especially in situations of emergency: if a member of the tribe was suddenly running, chances he/she spotted a potential source of food, or a predator who was ready to attack; and, in a relatively small community, it was easy for peers to know the odd case of a tribe-member who was always running for no reason.

Why is sex so often present in our minds? Because most of the beings with low libido are, well, extincted due to lack of off-springs.

### **Meme explains a lot about our customs**

Meme is a label used to identify units of cultural ideas, symbols or practices; meme are, by their own nature, transmittable from one mind to another. This means that customs which are easily transmissible in a given context, are likely to stick around for long regardless of their degree of truthfulness, sometimes even when they are objectively detrimental to the people implementing them.

### **The need for more research**

Science already made remarkable discoveries in the field of subjective well-being, this justifies investing more resources

in research, both longitudinal (across time) and latitudinal (across different demographics).

### **The need for more wide-spread awareness**

Initiatives like the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index are extremely important to spread awareness about SWB, and remind to policy makers the importance of keeping SWB into high consideration. We hope these kind of measurements will become even more prominent.

### **The need for critical thinking**

Subjective well-being requires, among other things, to act accordingly to our interpretation and evaluation of data, information, communications, and argumentation. It requires us to quantify a degree of confidence with which we embrace, or decline, the different options available. Considering the importance, and number of stakeholders, active in SWB, we do need to think critically about what we do; there are several good points made by researchers and thinkers about the pitfalls of a society which, instead of a genuine interest in SWB, develops a superficial “feel good” approach to life. We'll suggest some of them, in new releases of this book.

### **About religion, metaphysics, spirituality and ethics**

Religions include several aspects, like theology, metaphysics, spirituality, ethics, etc. Many religions deeply differs from each other about theology and metaphysics; even more in the way they label and describe them. Spirituality and ethics can be a subset of a religion, with many similarities across different traditions; or they can be a way we relate with ourselves and all the beings, outside a religious framework.

Religious choices, based on what we believe, are not a subject of this book. Spirituality and ethics, based on what we experienced as appropriate in given contexts, will be discussed further in future releases.

### **About opportunities, challenges, and problems**

Everything is as it should be, given the current components of the present context. If we want to change the outcome of the situation, then we need to take action. In the case of opportunities, the upside for us is the most evident. When we see challenges, we are focused on the question marks raised by a situation; still, by taking action, we can overcome them. When we see problems, then the focus is all on the threats; problems cannot be solved with the same mind-set which created them, they demand a brand new approach, otherwise they would not even be problems in the first place.

### **Happiness to be found East?**

Rudyard Kipling's line from the "The Ballad Of East And West" is mentioned many times: "Oh, East is East, and West is West, and never the twain shall meet". Unfortunately, the rest of the quotation is often omitted: "But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth, When two strong men stand face to face, tho' they come from the ends of the earth!".

East and West, North and South, they can all meet and share the fruits of their cultures and understanding. It is important to say that, all along the history of the "West", there were voices who had a more holistic view about life and happiness; also, from the East, there were dual doctrines. That means to look East is not necessary to live joyfully, even if of course the wealth of wisdom developed in the East can facilitate us. There were philosophers, like Epicurus, who hinted to ways of living happily; unfortunately, these voices were not considered supportive to the ruling classes and status-quot, and so were ignored, misrepresented or even repressed.